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ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

The Civil War of Private Cooke

A WISCONSIN BOY IN THE UNION ARMY

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin

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THE CIVIL WAR OF PRIVATE COOKE

A Wisconsin Boy in the Union Army

by

JAMES I. CLARK

"I HAVE A BOY who wants to go to the war and I would give his life as cheerfully as Abraham offered his son if necessary that the slaves might be freed," said Samuel Shattuck Cooke, of Buffalo County, Wisconsin, clinching an argument over abolition.

"Father meant all right, though it seemed hard," that son later recalled, "but I love him all the more for it, although I suppose I am the boy he meant for the sacrifice." He must have been. He was the only son near old enough to join the Union Army. Samuel didn't have to give his boy, however. The boy was more than eager to go.[1]

An Abolitionist father and the timely visit of a recruiting officer combined to set sixteen-year-old Chauncey Cooke on a parade ground at La Crosse in September 1862, waiting to pass the final entrance exam. His eyes riveted on a spot fifteen paces ahead, feeling the sweat running down his legs into his boots, would-be Private Cooke waited, and tried to keep from trembling. He prayed the stubble on his chin would add at least two years to his appearance, and hoped the mustering officer wouldn't stop and ask the year of his birth.

Hands behind his back, the officer moved slowly down the line. He looked closely at the men assembled in ramrod-stiff ranks. Those unable to convince him they were at least eighteen were out of the army. He got to Chauncey, looked him over—and moved on. The boy from Gilmanton, who had wanted so long to join the army, was a full-fledged private in Company G, 25th Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteers.

Private Cooke was a boy with roots deep in pioneer America. His father's ancestors had settled in Connecticut in 1667. A great-grandparent had been killed by Indians in the

Mohawk Valley in the 1770's. Samuel Cooke was born in Franklin County, Ohio, and in 1846 Chauncey joined the family at Columbus. Then there was another move, to Winchester, Indiana. From there in 1856 the Cookes with Chauncey, two brothers and a sister, took a 370 mile wagon trip to western Wisconsin.

The land they settled on in Buffalo County still belonged to rattlesnakes, bear, elk, deer and Indians. Neighbors were more than seven miles away. Raising a house, getting in a crop, protecting the stock from bears and wolves was a long day's job for all members of the family. It was such a life that Chauncey left to enlist in the army.[2]

The war Chauncey was joining was a year and a half old. Hard fought battles at Bull Run, around Richmond, at Shiloh and attacks on Forts Henry and Donelson had disproved the notion that it would be a short, easy war. As the recruits at La Crosse sweated out the mustering, a Federal army under McClellan got ready was preparing to halt Lee's Confederate army at a little town in Maryland called Antietam, and prepare the people of the country for the Emancipation Proclamation.

Wisconsin as the War Began

The state of Wisconsin had greeted the war with financial panic, caused by many bank failures. Banks at that time could issue their own currency and had only to possess a certain number of bonds from any state to guarantee that currency and the notes they issued. Most bankers had invested heavily in the bonds of Southern states, as they were cheap and paid high interest. Many of the banks were none too careful in protecting deposits and making sound investments. When the Southern states seceded, the bonds held by Wisconsin banks became worthless. Runs began and many banks had to close their doors.

Bank currency values sank rapidly. A man collecting his pay might find he had worked a week for practically nothing. Merchants refused to take any money save hard coin or produce for groceries.

As a result, tempers rose, mobs gathered and marched on banks. Serious riots occurred in Milwaukee where state militia had to be called out to protect the bankers and their property. Recommendations by a group of bankers led by Alexander Mitchell, well-known Milwaukee financier, were adopted by the Wisconsin legislature and the situation brought under control. Laws were passed replacing worthless Southern bonds with Wisconsin state bonds in certain banks, and strict banking regulations enacted, enforcement to be aided by a bankers' organization. By the end of the summer financial troubles were pretty well over.

As to the war effort, Wisconsin militia companies were mustered into the Union army and as rapidly as possible marched off from training camps set up at Madison, Oshkosh, Racine, Milwaukee and elsewhere. The 1st Wisconsin Regiment, made up of ninety-day volunteers, got off, fought at Bull Run and in August 1861 was back in Milwaukee. In the fall it was reorganized with three-year men. Recruiting stations were established in various parts of the state and newspapers gave publicity to calls for volunteers.

A Wisconsin bank note used during the Civil War.

In Alma, near Chauncey Cooke's home, the *Buffalo County Journal* took a strong stand on the war. "Forces, sufficient to quell their rebellion, should be thrown into the South, and so centered that they can disperse the rebels and command the country," thundered the editor. "If seventy-five thousand men are not enough, send half a million."

As it turned out, half a million was not nearly enough. In order to make enlisting more attractive, the state of Wisconsin provided for payments of $5 per month to soldiers' dependents. Communities were authorized to tax themselves to raise additional bounty and benefit money. Many towns conducted campaigns to get money for volunteers. In some places by the middle of the war a person could collect over $300 for joining up, combining local and federal bounties. A re-enlisting veteran got an extra $100.

When the national government began drafting men, each county was given a certain quota to fill. That could be done either with volunteers or conscripts, up to a certain time deadline set with each call for troops. As soldiers were credited to the county in which they joined, and not to their place of residence, county rivalry was keen. Those counties with means often held out larger rewards to volunteers than neighboring counties could offer, thus filling quotas more rapidly.[3]

Buffalo County had its troubles with Pepin County, represented by the town of Durand, just across the line. The editor of the *Journal* took note of the trickery next door:[4]

> We understand that Pepin county is offering $50 for each recruit from this county who enrolls himself in that county, giving them the credit. We had nothing to say when Durand gave a free Ball to our county as an inducement for our people to help them vote on their county seat, but we shall earnestly object to their stealing our soldiers. We care not where nor in what county our men enlist, as long as Buffalo county receives the credit.

The idea of entering the army was not pleasant for many young men of the North. A few without the $300 to hire a substitute found the Cana-

dian climate more desirable. In Port Washington, Wisconsin, as in some other places in the North, troops were called out to put down draft riots in 1862.

In Buffalo County there were some who were reluctant to don a uniform, regardless of the offers of money. A writer from Gilmanton pointed out in 1862: "Men who, the week before, listened for Indians until all was blue, and could have heard a percussion crack 80 rods, were taken suddenly deaf. . . . Others, who have watched for an Indian's head to peep over bluffs two miles away, cannot see well enough to shoot and hit the broad side of a barn at ten paces."

Before the war ended, probably 11,000 Wisconsinites had "skedaddled" for other parts. From more patriotic sources, the state again and again raised more than its quota of troops. At that time it was considered shameful to be drafted. No community wanted to injure its reputation by having to fill quotas that way and a lot of money was raised by taxation and subscription to reward volunteers. Wisconsin had to use very little actual conscription to get men into the army.[5]

The Sioux War in Minnesota

There was another matter to be handled first, however. The 25th Regiment hadn't drilled more than a week when it was loaded on a steamer and shipped up the Mississippi to Fort Snelling, Minnesota. A part of the Sioux nation, living on reservations in the western part of that state, was in revolt. Minnesota had called for federal help for its militia, and in this area the Civil War was pushed into the background.

General dissatisfaction with treaty arrangements, delay in annuity payments, faulty administration of Indian affairs, and the ever-present whiskey had finally combined to drive the Sioux along the Minnesota into open warfare. They shot, burned, butchered and scalped about 500 whites before they were brought under control and thirty-eight of the tribesmen hanged. They hadn't had a chance to throw off white control. Yet living so long out of touch with settled areas of the state, they didn't know the strength of arms the white men could bring to bear.

Although the uprising was really a Minnesota problem it obviously affected Wisconsin. During the autumn of 1862 many Wisconsin residents saw Indians in every bush. The fear of an uprising of the Indians in the state caused general panics. Towns were barricaded, old rusty guns repaired, women and children sped to safety at the slightest rumor of approaching Indians. The panic carried across the state, finally reaching the shore of Lake Michigan before people realized how baseless their fears were. Then they looked at one another, grinned sheepishly, and wondered how the thing had started.

In Buffalo County most people took a dim view of Indians generally, and the area near the river was understandably more affected by the panic. The *Journal* editor expressed what was on most people's minds when he wrote:

> It is useless to tell us that no danger need be apprehended from other Indians than the Sioux—we believe they all understand the programme, and will act in concert as soon as it is convenient for them

to do so. . . . We are in favor of extermination, and do not hesitate in expressing the belief, though we may be called a fool, that the Chippewas, and other tribes, are only waiting for a favorable opportunity to strike a telling blow.

The Chippewa and other Indians on Wisconsin reservations actually had more to fear from panic-stricken whites than the whites had to fear from them. Wisconsin Indians had no intention of attacking anyone and were very eager to remain at peace. They were no less happy than the whites when the excitement subsided.

By the end of November the Indian war was over, and the Union troops were shipped back. Some of the fire-eaters of the 25th were disappointed, but not Chauncey. He had no use for fighting Indians. All he had got from the war was a case of measles, a disease that killed a number of men in his regiment.

Chauncey was not sure but that the Indians had had good reasons for fighting. But in the face of a majority opinion to the contrary, he kept his thoughts to himself, or put them in his letters home:

> The right wing of our Reg't came down the Minnesota some days ago bringing with them 1700 captured Sioux, wives, children and old men and women of the hostiles. . . . They are a broken-hearted, ragged, dejected looking lot. . . . Like the children of Israel in the Bible story they are forced to go forever from the homes of their childhood and the graves of their fathers to dwell in the mountains and on the barren plains of a strange land. . . . The white man's face was their hate and their sorrow and they showed it by hate in their eyes and their black lowering brows. Why shouldn't they? What had they done? What was their crime? The white man had driven them from one reservation to another. They were weary and broken-hearted and desperate at the broken promises of the government. And when they took up arms in desperation for their homes and the graves of their sires they are called savages and red devils. When we white people do the same things we are written down in history as heroes and patriots. Why this difference? I can't see into it.

Very few at the time took the trouble to try to "see into it." Chauncey had grown up near Indians, had played with them, and knew them as friendly people. He was sensitive, impressionable and thoughtful. He was also influenced by the writings of Episcopal Bishop John B. Whipple, who had worked among the Sioux, understood their problems, and had predicted the trouble that had occurred. Later it could be seen that had the Indians received better treatment they probably wouldn't have gone on the warpath. At the time it took courage to say that. On the other hand, had Chauncey lived in another place, had he lived on a farm along the Minnesota river, he might have felt differently about the Sioux War of 1862.[6]

Back to the Civil War

Leaving Minnesota the 25th was sent to Camp Randall, at Madison, with a brief stop along the way for furloughs at home. At Randall the boys found more drill, bad food, cold barracks and the monotony of waiting that is nine-tenths of army life.

Camp Randall, at Madison, where the football stadium is now located.

The distance from the war, the seemingly endless waiting, turned the eagerness for army life into griping—about guard duty, food, and the army in general. Wrote Chauncey on Christmas Day, possibly with some exaggeration:

> It seems like foolery to the common soldier that for two hours we must stand in a temperature of 30 or 40 degrees when we are a thousand miles from the enemy. I had to walk and walk to keep from freezing. The mercury was down near 40 below zero and the guard house where we sat down between reliefs or lay down was little better than outdoors. The health of our Regiment is none too good. One man dies on an average every day. As I write this letter the drum is beating. The food we get is to blame for our bad health. The boys threaten a riot every day for the bad beef and spoilt bread issued to us and all this in our home state of Wisconsin.

Yet there was a pleasant side too. When it was not so cold, and guard duty was over for awhile, army life was not so bad:

> I get a lunch nearly every day at a little grocery just outside the fence. I get a glass of cider, a handful of crackers and a nice piece of Swiss cheese for ten cents. They are Swiss Germans that run the grocery and the girl that clerks has the blackest hair and eyes I ever saw. She has been in this country three years and talks very good English. She has a brother in the Swiss army and when she brags the Swiss soldiers and how much nicer they are than we Yankees, she shows the prettiest white teeth as she smiles.

In February 1863, the regiment moved down to Columbus, Kentucky, a little south of where the Ohio flows into the Mississippi. There guard duty and the care of the rifle made more sense. The movement of troops and supplies for the build-up around Vicksburg and the guarding of Confederate prisoners brought the war closer to Chauncey. There the 27th, 31st and 34th Wisconsin regiments joined the 25th. The outfits made a full brigade.

Many off-duty hours were spent exploring the country. Some people

he found resentful and suspicious of the Yankee soldiers. "Yet we found some places where we were invited into the house and where the young ladies would smile and would talk to us about our homes."

The huge numbers of ex-slaves flowing into camp amazed him. "All the old buildings in the edge of town are more than full," he told his parents. "You never meet one but he jerks his hat off and bows and shows the whitest teeth. I never saw a bunch of them together but I could pick out an Uncle Tom, a Quimbo, a Sambo, Chloe, a Eliza or any other character in Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Leisure hours were also spent in horseplay, or getting together with the boys for a bit of singing. He mentioned "My Old Kentucky Home," and said, "I found out a strange thing lately, the darkies don't know anything about the song . . . except as they picked it up from hearing the whites sing it. . . . Their ignorance of the song gave me a curious feeling." Another time he told his parents back home, "Some new war songs have struck camp lately. One of them is 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home'."

Yet the nights on guard duty were long and lonely, and brought memories of a farm dog and good times back in Buffalo County.

> When the stars are shining I always look for the dipper and the north star. They are both a little lower down here than in the north but they look just as friendly as they did in Wisconsin. . . . I remember how I used to look up at the stars when I was out trapping alone with old Prince, over Traverse creek or in Borst Valley. The barking of foxes and the snort of passing deer would keep me awake for hours.

Nearness to the scene of action had not eliminated the normal confusion and uncertainty that is part of army life. There was still plenty of the "hurry up and wait," in orders to get ready to move and counter-orders to hold up awhile. One night an urgent order came to leave immediately. Baggage was hastily packed, ranks were formed, and the camp burned as it was thought that the outfit wouldn't be returning that way. As the blaze got nicely under way, a messenger came with an order to return to camp. "Such a howl as went up from a thousand mad men you never heard," related Chauncey. "Here we had packed our moveables and burned the rest, and it was midnight and dark but for the fire. We lay down and pulled over us for the rest of the night the tent cloth and we went to sleep."

Early in June an order came that wasn't countermanded and the outfit moved closer to the action around Vicksburg. The regiment was part of a force placed first near Satartia, and later saw action around Haynes Bluff and Snyders Bluff near Vicksburg. There were a number of Wisconsin regiments in the fighting around Vicksburg, such as the 11th, 24th, 29th, 14th, 8th and others.

Even so close to the place of battle there was still time for fun and frolic and Chauncey faithfully reported the events:

> The day before we left Satartia some of our boys raided a big plantation, took everything in sight and came into camp with a mule

team and wagon loaded with a fancy piano. They put the piano on board a steamboat and blindfolded the mules, which were wild, and turned them loose in camp. It was a crazy thing to do. There was some beehives in the wagon full of honey and bees. The mules ran over some tents nearly killing a lot of soldiers and scattering bees and boxes along the way. It was fun all right for some of the boys got badly stung.

On the outskirts of the fighting for Vicksburg Chauncey discovered that war was more than waving flags, playing bands and pretty girls smiling goodbye to the troops as they left home. The scenes of death, waste and destruction impressed him.

The air is sickening with the stench of decaying flesh. Mississippi is full of cattle running wild in the cane brakes, and the boys are shooting great, beautiful steers on sight as they would rabbits, leaving everything here but the choicest parts on the ground to smell and stink. Ten miles from here the people in Vicksburg are starving for beef to eat and where we are camped the air is poisoned with the decaying flesh of animals more than we can eat. . . . Just think of the horror of 50,000 people with half enough to eat, with no rest nor sleep, stormed at with shot and shell, night and day in the city of Vicksburg. They have dug holes under their houses and in the bluffs and on the river side to get away from the shot and bursting shell of Union guns.

Yet with all that, Chauncey didn't turn away from fighting. Neither did he discard what he considered the main objective of the war: freeing the slaves. Others in his outfit might tease the freedmen, treat them roughly and laugh at them, and question the wisdom of freeing them. "I tell the boys right to their face I am in the war for the freedom of the slave," he wrote. "When they talk about saving the Union I tell them that is Dutch to me. I am for helping the slaves if the Union goes to smash." He was speaking, in great part, for his Abolitionist father, not necessarily for the North and Wisconsin in general.

In his fight to free the slaves, Chauncey and his companions were in greater danger from disease than from Confederate bullets. Unsanitary conditions in the fever-infested country in which they lived and fought that summer brought disease and death to many in the Union army. Chauncey was shipped upriver to Helena, Arkansas for guard duty after the fall of Vicksburg. A short time later he was struck down by pneumonia.

In hospitals in Memphis, where he spent the winter, his thoughts followed the Mississippi upstream to home. "When I dip my hand in the water," he had once written, "I think that it comes from Wisconsin and I wonder what part of it comes from Beef River."

On the Home Front

Up where the Beef flowed into the Mississippi, farmers, like those in other parts of Wisconsin, had been planting wheat and watching the price climb. It went from $.50 in 1861 to $1.06 by the middle of 1863. Before the end of the war it had hit $1.70 a bushel at Alma. River boats left the piers there choked with grain, heavily-laden railroad cars crossed the state to deliver wheat to elevators at Milwaukee. Wisconsin furnished a large share of food for Union armies. One hundred million bushels of wheat alone were produced during the war.

The war also aided the growth of Wisconsin industry. A boom in flour-milling was a direct result of the great production of wheat. The manufacture of flour for eastern markets centered in Milwaukee, and on a smaller scale was a part of the industrial activity of other lakeshore towns. Cities like Janesville and Watertown, Neenah and Menasha produced a great deal of flour for the local market.

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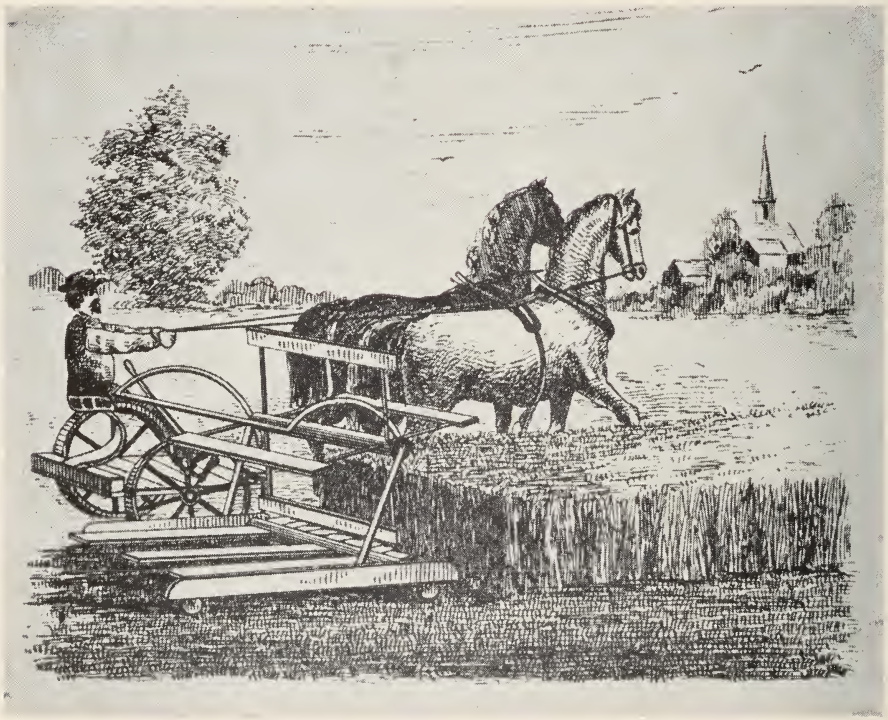
Thanks to increased demand for agricultural products, there was a boom in the manufacture of farm implements, centered in the southeastern part of the state. A good deal of the equipment found its way to the western side of Wisconsin. The La Crosse *Democrat* reported in 1863 that the "several agricultural shops in this city are driven with work and hardly able to meet the demands on them for threshing machines, reapers, fanning mills, &c."

Cities like Fond du Lac and Oshkosh, Peshtigo and Two Rivers, with access to the northeastern pineries, manufactured wood products. Racine and Milwaukee became important centers for furniture and wagon making, getting wood from the same pineries via Lake Michigan. Beginnings in iron manufacturing were made in Mayville, Ironton and Black River Falls, although that industry didn't grow rapidly until after the war. Some of this wood and iron work production was used in fighting the war; some had civilian uses.

On the farms increased use of the reaper overcame a part of the labor shortage caused when thousands of men went to war. Even women worked in the fields; young boys became men overnight. Increased production and higher prices for their products helped keep those on the land ahead of the 100% increase in the cost of living.

Grain cutting machinery used during the Civil War.



Laborers and mechanics in the cities found the war boom something less than beneficial. While prices doubled, wages increased barely 60%. Income of many workers went from $1 per day in 1861 to $1.25 in 1863. Women's wages didn't go above $3 to $4 per week. Too often laborers were paid irregularly, due to a scarcity of circulating currency. Often they had to accept store script, or certificates for goods, in place of checks or regular currency.

Low wages and the high cost of living caused many skilled workers to form unions. Among them were typographical workers, bricklayers, masons, blacksmiths, and merchant sailors. Some used strikes in efforts to get better wages. The strikes were often successful as profits were too good for employers to interrupt production. But if the employer did resist, the strike was usually lost. Few were won if they lasted more than three days. When the war ended, prices rapidly declined and laborers were somewhat better off. But their trade organizations also declined and returning soldiers made labor of all kinds more plentiful.

Politically Wisconsin was Republican, although there was a strong Democratic minority throughout the war. The Democratic party in Wisconsin, like the party all over the north, found itself in a somewhat difficult position. It was not allowed to forget that Democrats had led the South out of the Union. Northern Democratic attitudes toward the war varied from wholehearted support to out-and-out opposition.

Most party members in Wisconsin agreed with the "Address to the People by the Democracy of Wisconsin," largely the work of Edward G. Ryan of Milwaukee, and known since as "the Ryan Address." That document made it clear that Democrats were as loyal as Republicans, that the war would be supported, but that the party still reserved the right to disagree with the national administration on procedure. The address criticized the suspension of habeas corpus, the censorship of the press, the dangerous extension of the definition of treason, and the replacement in some places of jury trial with military courts. "The Administration may err," said Ryan, "but the Constitution does not change. And when the Administration violates the Constitution, loyalty to the Administration may become disloyalty to the Union. . . . In days of civil discord and convulsion, there is danger of patriotism being blindfolded, mistaking the object of its faith and transferring to the servant of the altar the devotion due only to the altar itself."

To many of those who wholeheartedly supported Lincoln's administration regardless of what it did, that was more or less confused thinking. It was difficult to convince such people that others could be loyal and still disagree with the way the government was conducted. It was wartime, and many felt that certain rights and privileges under the Constitution had to be temporarily suspended to protect the government.

It was easy to slip from the word "Democrat" to "Copperhead." There were probably enough Copperheads in Wisconsin to cause alarm for some, and a lot of noise generally. The local variety of Copperhead was much the same as that elsewhere. It was reported that in Madison many

"Brick" Pomeroy, Wisconsin editor and Copperhead.

Copperheads filed down the inch and a quarter copper pennies, leaving just the Indian head. To that was affixed a pin and thus they had a badge. Republicans then filed the eagle out of a silver quarter, attached a pin, and also had a badge.

The Milwaukee *News* and the Madison *Patriot* were generally considered Copperhead newspapers at the time. In the middle of the War the La Crosse *Democrat* under the noted Marcus M. "Brick" Pomeroy joined the minority ranks.

Pomeroy had supported the war although he was against freeing the slaves, until he got a close look at it around St. Louis and Helena, Arkansas in the summer of 1863. Illegal dealing in confiscated cotton by Union soldiers, more stealing than fighting in some cases, the mistreatment of the freedmen by some in the army, plus the general horror, destruction and terrific waste of war revolted him. Pomeroy was an idealist, and apparently very honest. He was also gifted with a flair for the spectacular and a love for any minority position. He was thus turned against the war, the Republicans and Lincoln. From Arkansas he wrote:

> The army is rotten: not in its body, but its heads. The war is dishonest. It was begun by people on one side to save *themselves,* on the other to save the Union; but it has become, through the corruption of Lincoln's court and official missions, but a murderous crusade for plunder and party power. Its aim is to create a moneyed aristocracy—compel the People to support it—. . . I will be no party to this robbery.

Pomeroy wrote many harsh words. He got into fights. People threatened to burn his building and equipment. His circulation dropped to 360. Yet he stuck it out; he insisted on being heard. He finally drove himself to the extreme position of calling Lincoln "The Widow-Maker of the 19th Century," and urged the election of General McClellan as President in 1864. He was a good enough newspaperman to stay in business, and remained there until after the war.

A near neighbor, the editor of the *Buffalo County Journal,* didn't take kindly to Pomeroy's new attitude. No opportunity was lost in bringing out the bad side of the La Crosse

A political cartoon on the 1864 Presidential campaign. General McClellan carries a spade because his enemies said he spent more time digging defensive trenches than in fighting Confederates.

editor. For the most part, the people of Buffalo County were hostile to Copperheads. Those sentiments were echoed by the soldiers in the field. Chauncey Cooke wrote home, "It makes the boys mad to read of copperheads at home. They are more dangerous than rebels at the front. . . . They had better lay low if we ever get home." The *Journal* prominently displayed a resolution from the 25th condemning Copperheads.[8]

In Buffalo County not all talk was of war, taxes, Copperheads and the price of wheat. The editor of the *Journal* occasionally took time off from editorializing on the benefits of buying non-taxable, six per cent war bonds and devoted some space to local problems. For example, the hogs that roamed the streets of Alma.

"Mr. Editor," wrote an unhappy farmer who had to come to Alma with his produce, "I wish to call your attention to the miserable condition of Alma. . . . First, the narrow and almost impassable road through the town. . . . Second, the large droves of nondescripts, called by some people *hogs,* that wait your coming like a pack of hungry wolves, and, if possible, as ravenous." Inasmuch as Alma had the Mississippi on one side and high bluffs on the other not much could be done about the narrow road, but the editor agreed on the hogs:

> The most intolerable nuisance to a community is a hog, of which this town is well represented. We are not very fond of pig-meat in any form, and when it will walk into your house, upset your tables, steal the last loaf of bread you have made, or scatter the contents of a floursack upon the floor, and do all this without saying anything but "Ugh," our patience becomes exhausted. . . . If those who raise them will have a little more regard for the feelings of their

The city of Oshkosh during the Civil War.

neighbors it will probably be the means of saving them considerable pork.

That off his chest, the editor could praise each month's issue of *Godey's Lady's Book,* a magazine full of pictures, recipes, stories, and articles on agriculture, subscriptions accepted at the *Journal* office at $3 per year. He also set ads urging the purchase of a $3 subscription to *Harper's Weekly,* which contained new stories by Thackeray and the new novel, "Great Expectations," by Charles Dickens.

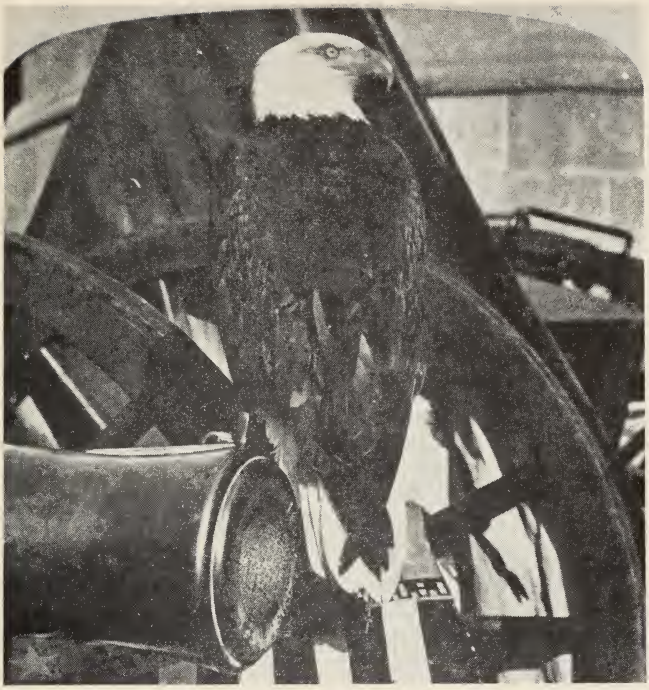
Those unable to go to war could, according to the ads in the paper, read about it in *Beyond the Lines, or A Yankee Prisoner Loose in Dixie,* "A New Book of Thrilling Interest. . . . A Book of Facts as They Actually Occurred." At the same time "Fifty of the Most Severe Battle Scenes—Scenes and Incidents of the War," were available in eighteen by thirty inch photographs. Four of them could be had for a quarter, twenty-five for a dollar. Speaking of pictures, a Mr. William Matter stopped for several days at the Alma House late in 1863, prepared "to take Melainotypes, Ambrotypes and Photographs, warranting satisfaction, and on the most reasonable terms."[9]

There were also periodic stories of new draft calls, emphasizing Wisconsin and Buffalo County quotas. By the middle of 1863 Wisconsin had sent about 43,500 into service, more than 42,000 of them volunteers. Before the end of the war probably 90,000 were or had been in uniform. Altogether, 56 Union Army regiments were made up of Wisconsin men. The 16th, 6th, and 7th formed part of the famous Iron Brigade. The 16th and 9th were made up mostly of Germans; the 15th was a Norwegian outfit. The 8th was one of the best known, carrying into battle "Old Abe," an eagle captured in the Chippewa Valley.[10]

Some troops were sent down the Mississippi as replacements in the 25th, and to take positions with other regiments in the spring of 1864, in preparation for the march against Atlanta.

The Assault on Atlanta

Chauncey Cooke won his bout with pneumonia and was released from the hospital in April 1864. He rejoined his regiment near Decatur, Alabama. From there the outfit went



"Old Abe," war eagle of the 8th Wisconsin.

by rail and foot to Chattanooga, where it became part of Sherman's Army of the Southwest, ready for the assault on the Georgian capital.

Joining Sherman's army put the 25th into its hardest fighting of the war. The southward advance of four columns of troops twenty miles long was bitterly contested by Confederate armies. Wisconsin soldiers fought through Resaca, past Kennesaw Mountain, Dallas, Deep Pine Woods and Marietta, lived on sow belly, hard tack and black coffee, slept fitfully under booming guns wherever they could drop in the rain and mud, saw comrades mowed down like grass, and long trains of wounded winding to the rear. The boys of the 25th Wisconsin found out what war was really like.

Chauncey continued to write letters home, whenever he could sit for a few minutes with a scrap of paper on his lap. He had little time to think of the meaning of the war, or even to be homesick. He concerned himself with staying alive.

"I don't know where to begin to tell you, of the last few days," he wrote at one point; "besides we are under marching orders to be ready to go at a moment's notice, just as we have been night and day for several days. As I write this, cannons are roaring on our left . . . and no soldier knows what the next hour may bring. I can scarcely keep my eyes open to write, although it is but ten o'clock in the morning."

In action against entrenched Confederates at Resaca he wrote:

It was a sight never to be forgotten, to see, as we could from the ridge, column after column of troops, two and three lines deep, forming in battle line away on our left for a mile and a half. Here and there a bursting shell from the fort would throw the line into confusion killing and wounding scores of men. By the time the smoke cleared up the lines would reform, the dead and wounded would be carried back by the ambulance corps. All that day until night, the big guns on the fort thundered at our batteries on every hill and ridge, on the north and west side. I don't know what our loss was. A shell burst just over us, killing and wounding a number in Co. L, next to our Co. A shell burst directly over me, cutting a hole in my blanket and the piece making a hole in the ground within a few inches of my body.

Then, in the fighting outside Dallas, near Lost Mountain, Chauncey witnessed an incident similar to those that occurred on other fronts during the Civil War:

All day long we shot wherever we saw a hand, a head or a puff of smoke, and the rebels did the same. . . . Several times during the day both sides would agree to a truce for ten minutes or twenty minutes, and some of the more daring on both sides would meet half way and exchange tobacco for whiskey and sometimes newspapers, sometimes to shake hands merely. Soon as the first fellow got back to his barricade he would call out, "Say pard are you ready?" If the answer came back "All ready," at once a dozen guns, perhaps a hundred would answer the challenge.

Before Atlanta fell disease laid Chauncey out again. He went back to a hospital, this time with a bad case of dysentery. He rejoined his regiment after the battle, at East Point, Georgia in the middle of September, 1864. Atlanta was in ruins. "I don't think I saw fifty buildings standing when we came through to this place yesterday," he wrote home. "They say we have got the confereracy on the run now sure and next spring will see the war over."

Chauncey witnessed it from far away, however. The fighting war of Private Cooke ended near Atlanta. While the 25th fought with Sherman to the sea, while Grant tightened the Union noose around Richmond, Chauncey was at home on furlough. The stay in Buffalo County lasted three months. Then he reported to Camp Randall and there sat out the remainder of the war. On May 15, 1865, the day he turned nineteen, he was discharged from the army.

Aftermath

The war had changed Chauncey's life. He had become acquainted with a section of the country he might never otherwise have seen. He had seen at close hand a problem that was to plague the country for many years to come, the freed Negro. Chauncey had gone to war to free the slaves, and whether he cared or not the Union had been saved too. But there were things to do before the Union could be really put back together, and Chauncey contributed in small part to that.

After the war he went to school at Eau Claire, learned to be a teacher, then went to Texas and taught in

Freedmen's schools. At the end of three years, perhaps feeling he had done his share, he returned to Buffalo County to be a farmer until his retirement and removal to Mondovi a short time before World War I.

The day of large wheat crops on Wisconsin farms gradually passed, the state slowly turned to dairying. Industries given a boost during the war continued to grow, except for milling, which shifted to Duluth and centers west of the Mississippi. For lumbering, the great day of the northern pineries was at hand. During the troubled days of reconstruction the majority of Wisconsin Republicans joined the Radical side, which meant they took sides against President Andrew Johnson.

Of the 90,000 Wisconsin men who joined the war, nearly 12,000 didn't return. Those who came back found a place in civilian life, formed veterans' groups, met periodically to mourn their fallen comrades and reminisce of battles, fun, and the sights they had seen. As the years went by, memories dimmed, the ranks grew thin, until there were no more. Chauncey Cooke died at Mondovi, in May, 1919.[11]

NOTES

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, material is from Chauncey Cooke's letters to his family, 1862–65, published intermittently in the Mondovi *Herald,* June 30, 1911 to January 30, 1914. Many of the letters can be found in *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 4:75–100, 208–17, 322–44, 431–56 (1920–21), 5:63–98 (1921–22).

[2] Warren W. Cooke, "A Frontiersman in Northwestern Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 23:281–303, 406–26 (March, June, 1940).

[3] Frederick Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin During the Civil War Decade* (Madison, 1916), 187–220; William F. Raney, *Wisconsin, A Story of Progress* (New York, 1940), 163; *Buffalo County Journal,* April 27, June 27, July 25, August 8, 22, September 12, 1861. (In mid-war the *Buffalo County Journal* became the *Alma Journal.* It will be cited hereafter as *Journal*).

[4] August 2, 1862.

[5] Raney, *Wisconsin,* 163; *Journal,* September 25, 1863.

[6] On the Sioux War, *Journal,* September 4, 11, 1862; Milo M. Quaife, "The Panic of 1862 in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 4:166–95 (1920–21); William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* (4 vols., St. Paul, 1924–1931), 2:109–303.

[7] Merk, *Economic History,* 128–87; William D. Love, *Wisconsin in the War of the Rebellion* (Chicago, 1866), 162–67; *Journal,* February 20, 1862; June 4, October 1, 1863; January 21, 28, June 30, July 14, 1864.

[8] E. C. Mason, "Old Copperheads and New," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 1:202–03 (December, 1917); Frank Klement, "'Brick' Pomeroy: Copperhead and Curmudgeon," *Ibid.,* 35:106–13, 156–57 (Winter, 1951); *Journal,* April 3, 1863; August 25, November 10, 1864.

[9] *Journal,* May 4, December 12, 1861; July 17, November 27, 1862; December 10, 1863; January 7, February 19, August 18, September 1, November 10, 1864.

[10] *Ibid.,* July 23, 1863; July 28, 1864; Raney, *Wisconsin,* 164–65.

[11] Mondovi *Herald,* May 16, 1919.

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According to Chauncey Cooke, his original Civil War letters were lost, destroyed, or given away. Before publishing them Chauncey said he had edited the letters, making some passages more clear and cleaning up the spelling (he was a very poor speller in his youth). What else he did to the letters is not known. There is reason to believe that some of the interpretations contained in them were added later. The depth of thought and insight some of the letters display, in relating the events of the Sioux War of 1862, in telling the attitudes toward the freed Negroes, the steadfast holding of a minority position regarding the Indian action and the treatment of the Negroes, and the general interpretation of the meaning of the war, sometimes seem more the writing of an adult viewing the war from quite a distance, than a teen-ager in the midst of it. Curiously, in light of Chauncey's avowed attitude toward slavery, there is no mention of the Emancipation Proclamation in the letters. It is not contended that *all* the letters have been seen, yet in January, 1863, when the Proclamation went into effect, Chauncey refers to Fremont's freeing of slaves in Missouri, which happened in 1861. He expresses disapproval of Lincoln's countermanding the order. If the letters were later changed, perhaps the chronology of events got mixed up.

On the other hand, a comparison of the letters to other items written by Chauncey later, appearing in the Mondovi *Herald,* indicates that his style had changed. Running through the letters is a simplicity of style that is not evident in later writings. It might have been difficult, if not impossible, to re-interpret war events many years later, and have the writing in keeping with the general tone of the original letters.

One thing is quite certain: Chauncey saw the part of the war he described. By using other sources, letters written to the Journal by other members of the 25th Wisconsin for example, one has a check on the events Chauncey wrote about.

The letters are valuable sources for understanding what the Civil War was like to a teen-ager from Wisconsin. One can get a glimpse of the war through a private's eyes—something that can't be had from general accounts. With the letters, the Civil War takes on greater meaning. One can see that army life is much the same for those in the ranks during any war.

William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota* (4 vols., St. Paul, 1924–1931), 2:109–303, gives a good account of the Sioux War. Milo M. Quaife, "The Panic of 1862 in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History,* 4:166–95 (1920–21), relates the effect of the uprising on Wisconsin residents. Frank Klement's article, "'Brick' Pomeroy: Copperhead and Curmudgeon," *Ibid.,* 35:106–13, 156–57 (Spring, 1951), covers Pomeroy's activity in Wisconsin. Warren W. Cooke, Chauncey's younger brother, wrote "A Frontiersman in Northwestern Wisconsin" *Ibid.,* 23:281–303, 406–26 (March, June, 1940). This article gives a good picture of farm life in Buffalo County during the 1850's and '60's. Frederick Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin During the Civil War Decade* (Madison, 1916), is the most complete treatment of the state during that time.

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